

Grace Grief Notes

Always Connected by Chaplain Wendy Manuel

Who knew a pandemic could teach us so much? As a hospice chaplain most of my work is to be *with* people, to be fully present with another person. To see her as she is now, to truly listen to his stories. Together we find meaning, hope, and peace. Much of my work is also being

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- Volunteering

with families - to share in their grief, to listen, to answer questions, to offer assurances and to validate emotions. Because I am unable to be with others in the "normal" ways (physically present), I have sought to be with others in creative ways. I make check-in phone calls to ask "how are you doing?" I mail "thinking of you" notes. And of course video chats with those who can. It doesn't feel quite the same. I long to see smiles, to hold hands and to feel hugs.

I also am being careful to take care of myself. I made a Covid-19 music playlist. Any song that has touched me since stay-at-home happened makes my list. Some are chants, some are oldies, some are new to me, some bring tears, some make me dance. (So far there are 39 songs on the list!) A bouquet of bright yellow tulips from the grocery store helps to keep me centered and lifts me out of the doldrums.

My prayer life has changed exponentially. I've always prayed. Now I am praying daily for many people by name. I strive to be very intentional in contemplating each person's needs. I also strive to make my prayers very real and honest. Sometimes I have to pour out my real feelings to God and not be quite so polite. I have yelled out loud - "God I'm angry!" After all, I believe what God wants just that from us - an authentic relationship.

All of this requires lots of quiet time, lots of reflection. I seek to put myself in others' shoes, what might they be experiencing? And then I

name it in my prayers. For example, one day I acknowledged that individuals have different experiences in the pandemic. I prayed:

Some feel threat to life and experience fear. God give us a sense of safety.

Some feel loss or loneliness and experience grief. God give us a sense of connectedness.

Some feel inner conflict and experience moral injury. God give us confidence that we are doing good and to believe in ourselves and in our teams.

Some feel wear and tear and experience fatigue. God give us calmness and rest.

I have experienced many prayers over the phone. I have prayed with a woman whose sister was dying and who held the phone to her sister's ears. I have prayed
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with a nurse whose tears expressed her anger at the separation caused by coronavirus, denying families the ability to be together. I have shared poetry as a prayer with a dying man and his wife.

When someone shares their feelings with me, I include the feelings as we pray together. Sometimes people struggle to tell God their true feelings.

I hope to encourage them to think of God as not far away, but present right here, right now, closer than close, listening to our whispers, holding us in our tears and sharing our joys.

I am reminded that we are always, always connected. Whether we are six feet apart, wearing masks or in isolation in our homes, we **are** still

connected. We can still be present to one another. The Creator made us this way. We are connected human to human. We are connected to creation. We are forever connected to what is holy, to God.

May you be blessed. For you I wish Shalom. Namaste. Assalamu alaikum. May all beings be filled with loving kindness. May peace be with you.

The Impact of COVID-19

In so many ways, Covid-19 has brought grief and loss into our lives. We now live with losses such as the grief of losing the normal routine of our lives, financial loss, the loss of touch for some due to physical distancing, as well as the death of a loved one due to the virus or other means. Each loss is significant and each one needs to be grieved. But how do we grieve, especially the death of a loved one, when our usual rituals are no longer available to us?

With funerals either being postponed or going virtual the grieving process is affected and even possibly, delayed. While certainly not



ideal, it is our new reality. Thankfully grief does not follow a timetable and will wait until there is time and

space to acknowledge and honor it. However, there are some things that may be helpful to do now to aid in the grieving process. Here are just a few ideas:

1. Go through photos. Share the photos and stories with another via FaceTime, Zoom or Skype.
2. Write down your feelings. Consider writing a goodbye letter to your loved one especially if you were not able to be there at the end of their life.
3. Allow yourself to feel all of your emotions. Trust that emotions are temporary and they will move through if you allow them expression. Tears are “holy water”.
4. Pray or meditate. Find your way to connect to something bigger than yourself.
5. Reach out to others. It is so important not to isolate during times of stress. Reach out via phone, video platforms or write cards or letters. Be honest with others about how you are doing and what you need during this time.
6. Remember that you have support through Grace Hospice. Reach out to us if you could use extra grief support at this time. We can connect by phone or let us know if you are interested in a support group via Zoom.

These are difficult times, especially as you grieve the death of a loved one. Now more than ever, please remember to be kind and gentle with your grieving self!

Grace Hospice Book Review

By: Gretta Sullwold, Bereavement and Volunteer Team Coordinator

The Other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells Us About Life After Loss
Copyright 2010 by George A. Bonanno

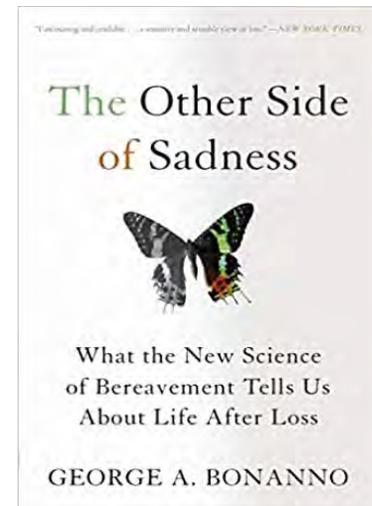
“Humans are wired to survive. Not everybody manages well, but most of us do. And some of us, it seems, can deal with just about anything.” Such a claim, especially while navigating grief during a pandemic, seems outrageous. But Bonanno (a psychologist and emotions expert) concludes from his years of research that this is in fact true.

In *The Other Side of Sadness*, Bonanno welcomes us into his world of grief research, both with his professional experience as well as his personal experience when he loses his father. His research shows us that positive experiences (i.e. laughter and joy) are very common in early bereavement. This has a positive impact on the long term effects of a loss. Many people are relieved to hear this, as they perhaps thought it was just them, or had some guilt amidst the joy.

Bonanno goes on to explain that, while everyone handles a loss individually, we are “hard-wired” as humans to endure; it is part of the human experience. There are no stages of grief. Rather, there is resilience of the human spirit, there is joy in memories, there are hard days, there are good days, and there is a new normal.

Because of how the brain is built and how it operates, stress reactions come and go. The stress reaction cannot stay 100% of the time because that would debilitate us. So eventually it abates - we laugh, we are distracted, we find joy, only for it to come back again. These are the “waves of grief” we so often hear about.

The theme of resiliency woven throughout this book was timely during the COVID-19 outbreak. Being reminded that we are built to navigate through hard things and come out the other side was uplifting. Bonanno reminds us that grief, loss, disasters, pandemics, war.... All have an effect on our lives and our emotional states. Some are better equipped to handle what life throws at us, but all of us have the ability to endure. It doesn't mean it's easy or fun or fair, but we know we can be resilient, because that's how we were made to be.



Though he is a scientist at his core, Bonanno has an unexpected reaction to his father's death. He is able to reconcile his research brain with his human brain and that is where his healing story lies. An interesting read as it merges the best of scientific research and personal experiences.

If you would be interested in a virtual grief support group via Zoom, please contact Nancy Loyd at 612-910-3342 or nbloyd@gracecaring.org

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The mission of Grace Hospice is to serve God by recognizing that every person deserves to live out his or her life with respect and dignity, free of pain, and in an environment that promotes quality of life.

Interested in Volunteering?

As you may be aware, we offer volunteer services to our patients and their families. Most of our volunteers come to us because they know first-hand about the comfort and support these volunteers provide to others. If you or someone you know would like an opportunity to give back to the hospice program, we encourage you to consider volunteering for Grace Hospice.

Our volunteers can visit patients and families, offer short respite for families needing to attend appointments, bake cookies or special treats, make phone calls, read mail or books

to those who can no longer make out the fine print, watch movies, play games,



or simply be a comforting presence. We invite you to consider putting your talents to use by helping those that need a little extra support.

Please feel free to contact Sarah Matthews, the volunteer coordinator for Grace Hospice, if you are interested in becoming a hospice volunteer, or learning more about our Hospice Volunteer Program. You can reach Sarah by phone at 612-843-6816 or by email at smmatthews@gracecaring.org.